



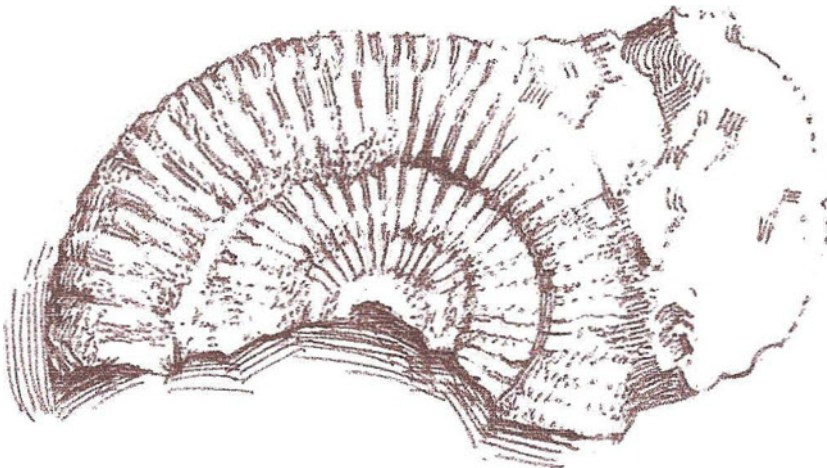
FOSSILS

If we'd been around, in what is now Steeple Aston, 180 million years or so ago, we would have been wallowing in a warm, sub-tropical, sea.

This was the period known as the Lower Jurassic, when both land and marine reptiles were prolific and the sea abounded with ammonites and other invertebrates, long since extinct.

In the vicinity of Steeple Aston, evidence of these ammonites and a number of bivalves, may be found, where the plough has cut through outcrops of sedimentary limestones.

Many of the ammonites, particularly the larger ones, are in pieces, but we have found a number, up to about three inches in diameter, virtually complete.



There seem to be three main species which occur more or less commonly. These are, Dactylioceras, Hildoceras and Harpoceras, all of which come from a geological stage called the Toarcian.

Interestingly, these ammonites are also found in the Liassic shales around Whitby, dating that part of the Yorkshire coast and this area, to the same period. In fact, Hildoceras is named after St. Hilda, the first Abbess of the abbey, whose ruins lie dramatically above the cliffs at Whitby.

My drawing is of an incomplete specimen of Dactylioceras, which measures 3 3/4 inches across.

Another common fossil is the bivalve, *Nuculana ovum*; superficially similar to a smooth version of our modern cockle.

These are often found as near-perfect casts, where the shell has degraded, leaving a solid limestone interior, which has weathered out of the surrounding matrix. The best specimens are bulbous, as their name implies and measure about one inch across.

All these creatures existed, of course, long before the advent of Man and it is an exciting thought that their remains have lain unseen for millions of years, before lying in the palm of your hand.

Peter Waite